WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Mr. Chairman : Before I take up the next item on the agenda, I would like to extend my hearty congratulations to all the newly-elected and re-elected Members and welcome them, on behalf of this House and on my own behalf.

Those Members who have been re-elected need no introduction to the rules, practices, conventions and traditions that govern the functioning of this House. Others, I am sure, will soon acquaint themselves with the spirit and the content of parliamentary procedure and practice. We look forward to their valuable contribution in the smooth functioning of the House and in maintaining high levels of informed debate. It is only through our collective efforts that this House can faithfully discharge its appointed functions, as well as its obligation to the people of India. I hope to receive your co-operation in that effort.

With these words, I once again welcome the new Members and wish them all success in their parliamentary career.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Construction of Old-Age Homes

*321. MISS FRIDA TOPNO :

SHRI SURESH KALMADI :

Will the Minister of Social Justice and Employment be pleased to state

(a) whether Government have announced a scheme for the construction of old-aged homes through NGOs during the Year of Elders;

(b) if so, the details regarding the amount allocated for the purpose, the number of applications received by Government from different voluntary organizations throughout the country, the number of applications cleared and grants sanctioned, and the number of applications still pending with Government for clearance with reasons therefor; and

(c) the details of the other schemes to help the elders in the country ?

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* The Question was actually asked on the floor of the House by Miss Frida Topno.

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT (SHRIMATI MANEKA GANDHI) : (a) A scheme of Assistance to Panchayati Raj Institutions/Voluntary Organizations/Self Help Groups for Construction of Old Age Homes/Multi Service Centres for Older Persons has been implemented since 1996-97. No fresh scheme has been announced for this purpose during the year 1999 which was declared as the International Year for the Older Persons by United Nations.

(b) In the year 1999-2000 a budget allocation of Rs. 2.39 Crores was made and an actual expenditure of Rs. 2.36 Crores has been incurred under this scheme. The total number of applications received under the scheme is 199 out of which 71 cases have been approved and the remaining applications are pending. The reasons for pendency include proposals being incomplete, lack of recommendations from State Govts. and limited availability of funds under the scheme.

(c) "An Integrated Programme for Older Persons" under which funds are released for maintenance of residential and day care centres, mobile medicare units and home based services is being supported by the Government for the infirm and destitute elderly. Besides a helpline for elders and mechanism for redressal of grievances have been operationlised.

MISS FRIDA TOPNO : Mr. Chairman, Sir, in our country, the number of old people is increasing; and the budget allocation of Rs. 2.39 crores for this purpose is very small. May I know from the hon. Minister whether she will increase the budgetary allocation in proportion to the increase in the number of old people?

Secondly, how many old age women homes have been proposed in Orissa? How much money is allotted ?

SHRIMATI MANEKA GANDHI : Sir, I don't think we are going to increase the budget substantially, from Rs. 2.39 crores, for old age homes. But I would like to inform the hon. Member that there are many, many other schemes which will do much more good than these old age homes. An old age home has a lay-out of Rs. 30 lakhs for just 25 people. Even if we were to increase it ten-fold or hundred fold, you still would not get beyond a thousand people a year. Therefore, there are many other schemes that are proposed; for example, day care centres. We are in the process of sending to the Cabinet a scheme for giving pension to the older persons in the unorganised sector. That would help them much more, than increasing the budget for old age homes.Secondly, we have found that you put them in Old Age Home, it realy

does not work for the people who are totally destitute, infirm and elderly. It is usually a questiuon of favours being granted for people to sit there whenever they want. How many we have done for Orissa, I would just like to tell you.

In Orissa, we have released Rs. 1.83 crores this year. (Interruptions).

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE : How can it be ? Out of Rs. 2.39 crores, have you given this much Orissa ?

SHRIMATI MANEKA GANDHI : I am sorry. This is for the integrated programme of all the different things. (Interruptions).

MISS MABEL REBELLO : What is the total budget for 1998-99 ?

SHRIMATI MANEKA GANDHI : We have given Rs. 38 lakhs just for the Old Age Homes, Rs. 91 lakhs for the Day Care Centres and Rs. 6 lakhs for the Mobile Medical Clinics.

MISS MABEL REBELLO : What is the total amount ?

SHRIMATI MANEKA GANDHI : I am afraid I have not got it. I will have to get the total amount. The total amount for the Old Age Home is Rs. 2.36 crores. That we have spent.

MISS MABEL REBELLO : What is the total maintenance you are given for the Old Age Homes ? Besides the Plan allocation, what is the non-Plan allocation ?

SHRIMATI MANEKA GANDHI : I have not get it. We have to give it to you. I just have the break-up for the Old Age Homes.

SHRI SURESH KALMADI : The total budget is Rs. 2.36 crores. That is all. It is very, very surprising that last year was the International Year for the Older Persons. This was declared by the United Nations. And the Government has come up with no fresh scheme at all for the older persons! It is very surprising. In the International Year at least, that should have been in sharp focus. The budget being so poor as it is, I am surprised that the Government has not come forward with any new scheme. The breaking up of the joint family system has created a serious problem of older persons. With the spate of murders of older persons, they do not have security as well. Are they thinking of a National Health Care Programme for the Aged, a thing to be done on a bigger scale, or at least in the rural areas, a Mid-Day Meal Scheme for them? The plight of the older persons is really pitiable in the rural areas. I would like to know why no scheme was declared in the International Year of the Older Persons declared by the United Nations.

SHRIMATI MANEKA GANDHI : As a matter of fact, we were the first people in the world in the International Year of the Older Persons to bring an Old Age Policy. This has come up for the first time in 50 years. That was brought up in January last year. Now, the Old Age Policy envisages a number of things. One is mobile medicare; one is pensions; one is we have made a National Council for the old to tell us what to do. One is the Day Care Centre which did not exist. The Mobile Health Care Clinics which did not exist are existing now. So, quite a lot was done last year.

We have made a programme for Adhar. The purpose of Adhar, which I would like to explain, is completely new. We will have a unit. We are in the process of developing units in every single district in India. If older persons have a problem with the law, if they have a problem with their pension, if they have a problem which they cannot deal with, this unit made by us, which will be the District Unit of Adhar, will look after them. Secondly, we wrote to the Chief Justice that old cases of people above 60 years, if they relate to properties specifically, should be put on a fast track. We are happy that the Chief Justice not only suggested but wrote to every High Court to ensure expenditious disposal of such cases. The Chief Justices of High Courts have issued instructions to the lower courts. The first to respond were Kerala, Madhaya Pradesh and Sikkim and action has been taken and they have gone on the fast track.

Secondly, since the Health Ministry does not come under me, in the spare of health services, I can only provide mobile health clinics. But more than that, what we have done is this. It may seem small, but it is of some benefit. We asked the Ministry of Health and they have issued instructions that there should be separate queues for older people and their cases should be taken up before everybody else. The Ministry of Health has issued instructions to every hospital to this effect. Thirdly, up till now, no doctor who is being trained in geriatric medicine, states that it is assumed that people who are old have the same kind of illness as you were having when you were young. For the first time, the medical curricula is having geriatric medicine as a part of it and we are planning to start the same this year. We have started a telephone health line. You have put a question as to what was done last year. So, I am just explaining in detail that a telephone health line has been started for the first time. So, anybody, who has a problem...(*Interruptions*)

MR. CHAIRMAN : Question Hour is over.